

# Lost Treasures

No. 4 - The Vikings

1<sup>st</sup> September 2005

***Welcome** to this exciting new six part 'adventure archaeology' series presented by antiquarian Mark Olly.*



***The North West has one of the richest histories in Britain but archaeologists have only just scratched the surface.***

***Mark went out and about in search of some of the North West's most intriguing lost treasures, legendary heroes and hidden history. Discovering how ordinary people frequently unearth lost treasures right on their own doorstep and demonstrating how anyone can help in solving some of the most puzzling mysteries in history by applying basic detective skills and commonsense.***



*"I call it adventure archaeology because you never know what you're going to turn up!"*

*Mark Olly*

# Lost Treasures

## No 4. The Vikings

### Vikings

For this fourth episode Mark begins in **Widnes**, on the trail of the Vikings, but why Widnes?

Today Widnes is an industrial town on the north bank of the great River Mersey. Our adventure starts in the 8<sup>th</sup> century at a time when Saxons ruled the land, ruled that is, until the Viking raiders arrived....

For 300 years the Vikings stormed the world. Their search for land, slaves, gold and silver took these brave warriors all across Europe, the speed and ferocity of their attacks became legendary and they were the most feared warriors ever to invade Britain.

The earliest Viking attack was in 793 famously recorded at **Lindisfarne** on the east coast of Northumbria and shocked the Christian world.

At first just a few opportunistic Viking pirates began preying on the rich pickings offered by monasteries, in time, however, the attacks intensified until scores of Viking ships came exploring the east coast, Scotland, Ireland and the west coast of Britain.

The Vikings were lords of the sea. Their wonderfully designed and appointed longboats carried them across wild seas into estuaries and along navigable rivers.

Wherever they went the Vikings had a massive impact. However, the native British Anglo-Saxons didn't give up without a fight. King Alfred's daughter, **Ethelfled** reinforced this part of the North West Britain from the Viking threat by building fortifications.

In the Victorian era, any finds coming from **Widnes** were attributed to Vikings and those coming from **Runcorn** to the Saxons as the tribes' land met where the Runcorn/Widnes bridges are today. Widnes comes from the name, 'vidnes' or wide nose, named by the Saxons but based on the fact that this land was seen by the Vikings as a mighty serpent's head.

In the early 10<sup>th</sup> century the Vikings were getting awfully restless. In about 1013 the Saxon Mercian Queen, Ethelfled, came to **Runcorn** (Runcorn) and built a burh or small fort to stop Vikings from infecting Mercian territory.

Ethelfled had a great military mind and realised this was an ideal defensive position to thwart Viking attacks, however, today it's not the impressive fort it once was.



# Lost Treasures

## No 4. The Vikings

Sadly the Victorian's burgeoning transport system included building a railway bridge at this strategic point and they put the railway supports right on top of the Saxon burh's remains.

Many Viking objects have been, and continue to be found on the north bank of Mersey and our knowledge is added to as more sites are discovered in the Wirral and Lancashire.

The largest discovery of Viking treasure in Europe was found on the banks of the [River Ribble](#) near [Preston](#). It's also one of the North West's best kept secrets...

Two experts - bioscientist & Viking expert [Steve Harding](#) & county archaeologist [Peter Iles](#) – helped Mark to piece together the story of the [Cuerdale Hoard](#).

In 1842 workmen repairing the riverbank found the hoard and dug it up in a frenzy of excitement. The Cuerdale hoard was vast numbering over 8,500 coins, jewellery and silver bullion. The hoard was buried in about 905AD - the same time that Vikings had been driven out of Dublin. But who buried it and why?

The Hoard contained a very large number of coins, ingots, jewellery and hack silver - that is jewellery, arm bracelets etc. having been cut up and effectively being used as currency. Steve believes that this was part of a very large war chest that would have been paying Viking armies in one of the several of campaigns going on in that period.

In terms of lost treasure, it's a vast amount of wealth for the Dark Age period, how could it ever have been left behind? Left to disappear into history, the hoard would have a modern day value of half a million pounds!

Regrettably the treasure was split between 41 British and foreign institutions and more than 170 individuals, many of whom are now unknown.

### [Halton Cross](#)

Steve then set off 20 miles up the M6 to investigate more evidence of Viking life in the North West.

At [St. Wilfred's Church](#) in [Halton](#) Village in North Lancashire you can see a wonderful piece of Viking carving called the [Halton Cross](#). The Vikings loved to tell stories with their stonework and this particular story is about [Sigurt the Volsung](#) from Norse mythology.



# Lost Treasures

## No 4. The Vikings

One of the really interesting aspects of this cross is that it appears to combine Christianity on the one hand, with paganism on the other, which suggests that this cross was erected in an early settlement, perhaps first generation Christians who were still hanging on to the old beliefs.

### Heysham

The search for further evidence of Vikings eventually led the team to a beautiful village, which sits on a cliff overlooking [Morecambe Bay](#).

At [Heysham Head](#) you'll find the chapels of [St. Peter](#) and [St. Patrick](#) and the wonderful thing about these chapels is that they're full of Anglo Saxon carvings.

Heysham Head provides a stunning location for a 6<sup>th</sup> century Saxon chapel. A grave containing a Viking sword was discovered in the churchyard but the most extraordinary features of the site are the grave slots cut into the solid rock... If these are Viking graves it's very likely they had settled & adopted Christian ways. The bodies followed an east/west alignment characteristic of Christian burials.

[Less than 50 miles from Heysham Head on a relatively unprotected island it was a completely different story...](#)

In 798AD the Viking menace swept onto the [Isle of Man](#), 50 miles off the coast of western Britain in the Irish Sea and started the story of this remarkable seafaring nation.

During this period the islanders lived in constant fear of their lives. At [Peel](#) the Vikings burnt the Monastery on [St. Patrick's Isle](#) to the ground, in the process destroying the earliest records of Manx history.

Eventually the Vikings settled on Man, bringing and combining their pagan ways and customs with the inhabitants. They met to dispute matters and proclaim their laws at [Tynwald](#) or Viking parliament, the oldest parliament in the world, which still meets to this day on exactly the same spot. By marrying the local chieftains' daughters, the Vikings acquired all the land in Man and adopted Christian customs.

This year, after an 18-year gap, the Isle of Man celebrated its unique history with a stunning Viking festival. Locals and visitors from around Britain were treated to re-enactments of famous battles.



# Lost Treasures

## No 4. The Vikings

One of the most popular events was a magnificent Viking sea burial recreation, which would have been especially reserved for Viking chieftains.

*Vikings believed that when they died their god Odin called them to Valhalla, the Hall of the Slain, to fight and drink in the afterlife.*

Despite their fearsome reputation Vikings are still a bit of a mystery... Driven by population growth, competition for farmland and ambitious leaders, Vikings colonised large parts of Britain including the North West. During the Victorian era storms and high tides battered our coastline and afforded us more evidence of their lives. More than 5,000 objects were found on the beach at **Meols**, making it one of the most significant ancient sites in north west of England.

You'll also find that Vikings have influenced 100s of place names all over Lancashire and Merseyside. For example, **Tranmere**, has the only football team in the English league with a Norwegian Viking name! Place names which end in 'kirk' like **Ormskirk** and 'by' such as **Crosby** or **West Kirby** also have strong Scandinavian influences.

The Vikings came to Wirral because the then Queen Ethelfled allowed them to settle, the land was low value marshy land, and she allowed them to settle on condition they behaved themselves and didn't cause trouble.

In a suburban part of **West Kirby** at **St. Bridgets Church** you'll find some more amazing examples of Viking history, a **Hogback gravestone**.

You'll find it just in the corner of the church, an enormous stone that six years ago was restored by Merseyside Conservation Centre. Believed to have been constructed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the stone is an important status symbol and monument to Viking colonialism. It is unusual to find it here in a Christian church, even though many Vikings had converted to Christianity by the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The Irony is that many locals don't realise it's here, such wonderful history on their doorstep!

Viking communities grew up in north Wirral whilst the Saxons inhabited the south and appeared to tolerate their Scandinavian neighbours. That situation changed dramatically in the summer of 937AD when a great Viking army from Dublin threatened the peace by pillaging English towns.



# Lost Treasures

## No 4. The Vikings

The Wirral name of [Thingwall](#), the site of the Viking parliament or 'thing' is possibly the place where the peaceful local Viking community discussed the coming onslaught...

The Anglo Saxon chronicles tell of one of the most ferocious battles ever fought on English soil at a place called [Brunanburh](#), possibly modern day [Bromborough](#).

The battle of Brunnanburh proved to be one of the most important conflicts ever fought in England. Historians hotly debate exactly where it took place but Steve Harding and his team are convinced it was fought at [Bebington Heath](#).

The vital clue appears in a reference to 'Ding's mere' where the defeated Vikings made their last ditch attempt to escape. This would have been pronounced '[Thingsmere](#)'. Could this possibly be related to the [Thingwall](#) of today?

The battle of Brunanburh was fought relentlessly for nearly 10 miles across the Wirral. The killing fields flowed with blood from sunrise to sunset; mounted Saxon warriors pursued the fleeing Viking forces and mercilessly felled them from behind as they tried to escape. It was utter carnage.

So was that the end of the Vikings on the Wirral? Well probably not. Recent DNA analysis of 50 men from old Wirral families demonstrated that 50% appeared to have genetic links with Viking settlers and so today that Viking influence still echoes in the Wirral landscape and its people.

**Take a good look around where you live; are you standing on a lost treasure?**



**If you'd like to find out more about the history of the area and do some of your own exploration and research check out the following links:**

***The World of the Vikings***

*An international web resource*

[www.worldofthevikings.com](http://www.worldofthevikings.com)

***Lancashire Archaeology and Heritage***

[www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/archaeologyandheritage](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/archaeologyandheritage)



# Lost Treasures

No 4. The Vikings

## **Cuerdale Hoard**

Find out all about the treasure from the British Museum's website at:

[www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)

## **Vikings in the Wirral**

[www.wirral-  
mbc.gov.uk/history/vikings/Vikings-in-  
wirral](http://www.wirral-<br/>mbc.gov.uk/history/vikings/Vikings-in-<br/>wirral)

**Isle of Man** – history and Norse heritage:  
Museum Peel Castle

[www.gov.im/mnh/heritage/museums/peelcastle](http://www.gov.im/mnh/heritage/museums/peelcastle)

## **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**

Thought to have been commissioned, or at least inspired, by Alfred The Great, this is a collection of English monastic chronicles that originate from a compilation made from old annals and other sources c.891. There are four distinct chronicles, that of: Winchester Abingdon Worcester and Peterborough. There is also a stirring poem about the great Battle of

**Brunanburh.**

[www.webmesh.co.uk](http://www.webmesh.co.uk)

## **Viking re-enactment groups**

If you'd like to get involved with a re-enactment group local to you, start by visiting The Vikings to learn more about it.

[www.vikingsonline.org.uk](http://www.vikingsonline.org.uk)

## **Liverpool Museum**

The history and heritage surrounding Liverpool.

[www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)

## **Early British Kingdoms**

A site offering many links on early British history.

[www.mythiccrossroads.com/british](http://www.mythiccrossroads.com/british)

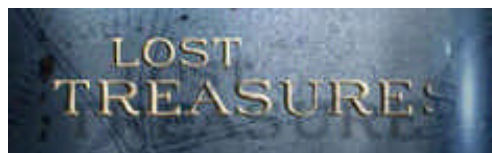
Viking Expert – Steve Harding's website

[www.nottingham.ac.uk/~sczsteve](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~sczsteve)

**Got a term you don't understand?**

**Check it out here:**

<http://archaeology.d.dictionarypage.co.uk>



**Get Involved!**



**Send us details of your local lost**

**treasure:** Click the **your treasure** tab on the main [www.lost-treasures.co.uk](http://www.lost-treasures.co.uk) website or email the team at

[info@lost-treasures.co.uk](mailto:info@lost-treasures.co.uk)



### *Portable Antiquities Scheme*

*Established in 1997 the **Portable Antiquities Scheme** is a countrywide community archaeology project to encourage the voluntary recording of archaeological objects found by the public in England and Wales - people who use metal-detector, go out walking, gardening or just going about their daily work. The objects found - if properly recorded - offer an important and irreplaceable source for understanding our past.*

*At its heart are the Scheme's **Finds Liaison Officers**, offer everyone a way to log all the finds for public benefit. The data recorded - itself an important educational resource - is published on the Scheme's website: [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)*

*The site gives you public access to over 134,000 records and over 52,000 images of finds, as diverse as prehistoric flints to post-medieval buckles – and new finds are going online every day! Emails to [info@finds.org.uk](mailto:info@finds.org.uk)*

### Presenter, Mark Oilly



Born and raised in Warrington. Mark Oilly established and runs the **Celtic Warrington Project** archaeological unit (CWP), whose aim is to document all prehistoric and Dark Age remains in the Mid Mersey Valley, North Cheshire and South Lancashire.

This unique historical project for the North West is revealing an unsuspected picture of the region in Dark Age times.

# Lost Treasures

No 4. The Vikings

Mark writes on archaeology and other subjects for local and national press. His books include the '*Celtic Warrington & Other Mysteries*' volumes, which have been based on six years of research. His other interests are wide ranging and include, musician, artist, photographer, and archaeologist, having trained at Liverpool University. Mark also holds a Certificate of Ministry and a Diploma of Biblical Studies and is part of '*Dalraida The Norsemen*', a dark age, living history, re-enactment aspect of Celtic Warrington.

Mark joined forces with **Virtual-Knutsford** in June 2000 and his work features regularly on the site. The second of Mark's '*Celtic Warrington & Other Mysteries*' volumes, which covers Knutsford and surrounding areas, appears in regular instalments. Find out more at [www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk](http://www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk)

## Mike Loades

Mike is a man of many parts; action arranger, historical weapons expert: historical advisor, presenter, writer, producer, director, teacher, lecturer, horseman, jousting, carriage driver, swordsman, archer, falconer and last but not least, black powder shooter. A good man to have in a tight spot, Mike's amazing knowledge of weaponry and fighting technique has led him to contribute to countless documentaries, films, theatre productions and books.

## Title Music from the series...

The title music from the series comes from Finnish band, '*Nightwish*'. If you'd like to find our more information about them check out:

[www.nightwish.com](http://www.nightwish.com)



# Lost Treasures

No 4. The Vikings

**'Lost Treasures'**  
**is a Planet X Production for**  
**ITV Granada**



**Producer:** *Phil Hirst*  
**Exec. Producer:** *Eamonn O'Neal*  
**Presenter:** *Mark Olly*  
**Editor:** *Paul Tovee*

This fact sheet was compiled for ITV  
Granada by Jacky Fitt –

[www.wordstofitt.com](http://www.wordstofitt.com)

Every possible effort is made to ensure that the information contained in our fact sheets is accurate at the time of publication. Whilst great care is taken in the reproduction of information: names, addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, URLs etc. ITV will not be held responsible for any loss or inconvenience caused by reproduction errors or omissions. Whilst ITV is pleased to publish details of helpful organisations, this does not imply recommendation of them, and publication of any details in literature, or on our websites, does not indicate an endorsement by ITV. ITV is not responsible for content of non-ITV websites.

The **ITV Duty Office** answers all general enquiries about ITV programmes in the regions and on the ITV network.

Their contact details are:

Tel: 0870 600 6766

Fax: 0121 634 4898

Minicom: 0870 241 6346

Opening hours:

Monday - Friday 08:00 - 23:00

Saturdays and Sundays 10:00 - 22:00

Closed on all official Bank Holidays

Address: Duty Office, Gas Street, Birmingham, B1 2JT

Or visit: **itv.com**

